

Lara has escaped - barely - with her life from the assassin sent to kill her in Luxor. But it was he who lost his life - and the vital pages of the notebook which Lara had thought lost. The recovered pages provide her with enough information to head out to the Valley of the Kings. But how to get there? Find out in the fifth episode of ERICA WAGNER's tale.

REALISING SHE WAS too exhausted to stand upright for much longer, Lara had headed back to her guesthouse after the encounter with Haggarty. She washed the blood from her knife and from her face and hands, and lay down in her clothes on the sagging cot. Despite the roil inside her head, sleep closed over her; but she woke again before the dawn, with the sun only a thin coral hint at the horizon. Before she left she dug the little statue of Isis out of her suitcase and set it on her pillow. If this wasn't the place for talismans, what place was?

She'd piece together where to go, she thought. North from the tombs, a distance measured in paces, that part was easy enough. The trouble was, after that Carter - clearly wishing to keep his discovery to himself - had shifted into what looked an ancient Egyptian system of measurement, based on the sun casting shadows at certain times of day; she didn't see how she could begin to work it out. But in Lara's book, being on the spot was three-quarters of the way to understanding. As for what had happened to Blackmore well, he wasn't in a position to help her any more, that was for sure, so she tried to put him out of her mind.

Now - how to get to the Valley of the Kings. She wasn't about to hail a taxi. Luckily, the answer presented itself as she turned into the Sharia al-Karnak. A boy on a motorcycle - an old Royal Enfield! Beat up, but beautiful still - he was arriving, she guessed, for work in some kitchen somewhere. He was just locking it up when she walked up to him.

"Salam' alekem," she said. He nodded at her, looked her up and down warily. "Nice bike," she said in English, pointing at it. She hoped for a universal language of motorcycles, and sure enough, there seemed to be one; the boy broke into a wide grin and caressed its headlamp.

"Can I have a ride?" Lara said. She gazed at him with wide, appealing eyes. He stared back, blankly. "You know a ride." Lara put her hands out in from her, bent her knees, and growled: "Vrrooom, vrroom. A ride."

"Ride!" The boy said, imitating her, then grinned again. "Ride! Sure, ride!" He looked like he couldn't believe his luck. He ought to be worried about losing his job, Lara thought sternly, but she'd make sure he wasn't even late for work. He climbed on and she climbed on behind him, wrapping her arms around his waist. He turned back to look at her and grinned even more broadly. He was, actually, pretty cute. "Vrrooom, vrrooom!" he said.

She didn't wait long; she didn't want to hurt him. As soon as they'd picked up a little speed she tightened her grip around his middle and flung him easily off the bike; he didn't weigh much at all. He howled as he fell, and stumbled, and tried to run after her, shouting something she couldn't understand; but at least he wasn't hurt. Gunning the engine to surge away from him, she reached into her pocket and yanked out a fistful of \$20 bills, throwing them behind her for the boy to catch. "Cheerio!" she called into the wind. "Thanks ever so much!" The wind whipped through her hair and soon the desert stretched before her, gold in the rising sun. Lara tried to keep a sense of hopelessness at bay as she followed the road out to the Valley of the Kings. The notebook - now tucked securely into her pocket - hadn't provided the answers she'd hoped; and now Blackmore's disappearance weighed on her mind, too. She felt certain they were both pawns in what was already proving to be a dead-

North from Tutankhamun's tomb...as the sun rose, Lara set her course by it. But as she rounded a curve she saw to her alarm a car speeding towards her, a battered Land Rover with darkened windows. It seemed to take up the whole of the road. Lara tooted the Enfield's horn but to no effect; within 20 yards it had become apparent that whoever was in that car meant her no good at all.

Lara swerved off the road into the sand, gripping tight to the motorcycle; with most of her traction gone she couldn't

risk taking a hand away to reach for her gun. She cut and dived as best she could, but the Land Rover

was travelling easily across the desert, its wheels biting deep into the sand while hers spun fruitlessly. On a last desperate attempt at evasion, Lara's back wheel whipped out from under her and she threw herself away from the bike as best she could to avoid being crushed. She'd never remember hitting the sand. The world closed around her.

When she woke, there was no sign of the bike, or the car. She lifted her head cautiously and was bitten by a sharp pain in ribs that made her gasp. Well, she could have done worse than a broken rib. Everything else seemed to be intact. Her face and hair were thick with sand and when she tried to brush it away she winced; clearing it made dried blood run to fresh. She blinked the worst out of her eyes and

How much time had passed? She looked east, where the sun had now risen well over the horizon; the sky was a pale, dry blue. And looking around her she saw that the desert landscape seemed even more unfamiliar than it had before. Where was she? There was no sign of the bike, nor of the Land Rover. She began to be certain that she had been moved, brought here. Getting away might prove tricky: the terrain was unenticing. Lara had a single canteen of water strapped to her hip (she could feel a bruise where it had banged against the bone). Her throat was already dry, her forehead already prickling with the heat, and the day had hardly begun.

It was then, looking down at the sand, that she saw the step. Or rather, a flatter surface beneath the sand that looked as if - she bent down, brushed the surface of the desert with her hand and in an instant felt stone beneath her palm. In her bag she had a small, collapsible spade and this she now extracted, digging as quickly as she could. The white desert burned all around her. She paid no heed. She

The next instalment of Down among the Dead will appear on Monday December 27.

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USING THE TIMES ROSETTA STONE (RIGHT) AS A KEY, TRANSLATE AND RE-ARRANGE THE PIECES OF THE SMASHED TABLET BELOW TO FIT THE BLANK GRID (WE HAVE ALREADY INSERTED THREE BLOCKS TO GET YOU STARTED). EACH PIECE CONTAINS THREE ELEMENTS -HIEROGLYPHS OR SPACES. SOLVE THE RIDDLE. WHEN YOU HAVE THE ANSWER, RING THE COMPETITION HOT-LINE, LEAVING THE ANSWER, YOUR NAME, ADDRESS AND DAYTIME TELEPHONE NUMBER. ENTRIES MAY ALSO BE MADE VIA OUR WEBSITE. CLUES MAY BE FOUND ON OUR WEBSITE AND AT

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Who am !?



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ONE WEEKLY SECOND PRIZE: Tomb Raider games 1, 2, 3 and 4, Lara Desk Statue, Lara Wallet, Bath Towel, Half Zip fleece, Lara Analogue watch, Lara Ladies watch, Lara T Shirt, Lara Mousemat, one copy of Microsoft Encarta Reference Suite 2000

Normal Times Newspapers competition rules apply. Merchandise may vary at our discretion.

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